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MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT RESUMES

If you think your resume isn't getting the job done for you, it might be because you don't understand resumes. On a regular basis, I find that three common misconceptions about resumes get in the way of successfully completing a job search.

PART I: Resumes get read.

Well they do, eventually. But in order for a resume to get read, it needs to get selected. Put yourself in the shoes of a recruiter or a hiring manager. Your resume comes to them in a big pile of resumes – anywhere from 25 to 200, often on a daily basis. Since they are not going to “read” that many resumes, their first step is to figure out what resumes to pay attention to. That means that the first and most important step in the resume process is to get your resume *selected*. If you have ever hired anyone, see if this process resonates with you. You reach for the pile and start to go through it. Resumes go into three piles: Yes, Maybe, No (or directly to the trash). It proceeds about like this, with only a few seconds per resume: no, no, no, no, yes, no, no, no, no, no, maybe, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, maybe, no, no, no, no, no, no, yes, no, no, no...

What gets a resume selected? First, obvious fit for the job requirements – do the key skills and experience jump off the page to the reader. Second, appearance – is the resume neat, professional, readable, and yes, without spelling mistakes. Third, valued characteristics that set the candidate apart – background at a prestigious company, outstanding education, clear record of accomplishments, logical career progression. To see how “selectable” your resume is, try this test. Put your resume on your desk. Glance at it. What do you see? Would you pick it out of a pile of 50 resumes to read?

PART II: Resumes get jobs.

If I had a dollar for every person who told me, “I’ve sent out lots of resumes, but I haven’t gotten any calls”, I’d be a very rich person. Resumes DO NOT GET JOBS. Your resume helps you get a job. In sales, brochures, fliers, samples, etc. are called marketing collateral. The dictionary defines collateral as “additional to and in support of something; accompanying or additional but secondary.” The point is that when you are looking for a job, you are the product and your resume is your marketing collateral. Think

about it. No one ever sold anything by simply dropping off their 12 page glossy brochure. In effect, that is what you are doing when you just send out your resume.

You still need a good resume. Your resume, done properly, may get someone's attention. But more likely, you need to get someone's attention and then, having gotten their interest, back it up with your resume to keep their attention. That's when they are ready to dig into the details. What does get jobs are effective networking, a well-planned well-executed job search, good interviewing skills, and a great professional self-presentation. Having a good resume is essential to the process but not sufficient.

Some people may need to have a bio in addition to a resume. A bio is also marketing collateral and serves as a lead-in document. It is an interest-getter that is especially useful in the networking process. In initial sales calls, the representative often starts with a short introductory or "leave behind" flier – just enough to cover the highlights – because until he or she has the customer's interest in the product or service, there is absolutely no interest in the detailed features. Do you see the parallel with your resume? Do you need to change your approach?

PART III: *There is a right way to write a resume.*

Everyone is an expert when it comes to resumes. Every recruiter, hiring manager, career consultant, teacher, author, and your older brother all believe they have the one magic formula! No matter what anyone tells you, they have not been handed the "truth". There is no magic formula – but common sense helps.

Common sense tells us that no matter what you believe or anyone else tells you about resume writing, the person who has the job is always right. You want the job, not to win a contest about the correct way to write a resume. So, if a recruiter or hiring manager wants a one page resume, write a one page resume.

Here are a few common sense guidelines for resumes:

1. Use an easily readable point size.
2. Make your name big enough to be picked out of a stack of papers.
3. Leave at least 1 inch margins all the way around.
4. Include your name and page number – contact information optional – on any pages after page 1. If your name is not on the 2nd or subsequent pages and printed pages get separated, for example, at the copier, there is no way for the lost pages to get re-attached correctly.
5. Depending on your audience and work history, your resume may be 1-3 pages. Just make sure that what's on it adds real value.
6. For hardcopy, good quality white, grey, and ivory make the best professional presentation. Make sure the color is light enough to copy well.
7. No spelling mistakes.
8. Use a positioning summary followed by a simple chronological format. No one will read your resume if they have to work too hard to piece it together. Watch an experienced recruiter. They go to the most recent job and start reading there. If your job information doesn't start until page two, you have wasted an entire page of prime real estate.